



Appearance and Reality : a Metaphysical essay (1916)

F.H. BRADLEY (LL.D. GLASGOW)

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I HAVE described the following work as an essay in metaphysics. Neither in form nor extent does it carry out the idea of a system. Its subject indeed is central enough to justify the exhaustive treatment of every problem. But what I have done is in complete, and what has been left undone has often been omitted arbitrarily. The book is a more or less desultory handling of perhaps the chief questions in metaphysics. There were several reasons why I did not attempt a more systematic treatise, and to carry out even what I proposed has proved enough for my powers. I began this book in the autumn of 1887, and, after writing the first two fifths of it in twelve months, then took three years with the remainder. My work has been suspended several times through long intervals of compulsory idleness, and I have been glad to finish it when and how I could. I do not say this to obviate criticism on a book now deliberately published. But, if I had attempted more, I should probably have completed nothing. And in the main I have accomplished all that lay within my compass. This volume is meant to be a critical discussion of first principles, and its object is to stimulate inquiry and doubt. To originality in any other sense it makes no claim. If the reader finds that on any points he has been led once more to reflect, I shall not have failed, so far as I can, to be original. But I should add that my book is not intended for the beginner. Its language in general I hope is not over-technical, but I have sometimes used terms intelligible only to the student. The index supplied is not an index but a mere collection of certain references.

My book does not design to be permanent, and will be satisfied to be negative, so long as that word implies an attitude of active questioning. The chief need of English philosophy is, I think, a skeptical study of first principles, and I do not know of any work which seems to meet this need sufficiently. By skepticism is not meant doubt about or disbelief in some tenet or tenets. I understand by it an attempt to become aware of and to doubt all preconceptions. Such scepticism is the result only of labour and education, but it is a training which cannot with impunity be neglected. And I know no reason why the English mind, if it would but subject itself to this discipline, should not in our day produce a rational system of first principles. If I have helped to forward this result, then, whatever form it may take, my ambition will be satisfied. The reason why I have so much abstained from historical criticism and direct polemics may be briefly stated. I have written for English readers, and it would not help them much to learn my relation to German writers.

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